



DELAWARE

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS RELEASE

DelDOT Public Relations

1-800-652-5600 or 302-760-2080

dot-public-relations@state.de.us

www.deldot.net

April 4, 2006

“Slow Down and Pay Attention” **National Work Zone Awareness Week**

Dover – Dan Maher was just completing his first week with the DelDOT Motorist Assistance Patrol (MAP - whose duties include helping disabled motorists along the highway) when something terrifying happened to him. Dan, of Dover, relates:

It was the evening of Friday, May 20, 2005, and I still have a visual image of those few horrific seconds. At about 8:30 p.m., I had been dispatched to retrieve a chair from the southbound lanes of the C & D Canal Bridge. I had made two trips into the lane to retrieve portions of the chair and then entered the vehicle from the passenger's side door (for safety, away from traffic) and climbed across the front seat to get back behind the wheel. I had just sat down and was reaching for the seatbelt, when it was as if my life passed in front of me.

I heard that God-awful crunch from behind and my truck lurched forward. Although the vehicle was in park, I helplessly realized that it was being pushed uncontrollably down the highway for approximately 20 feet.

Still not realizing what happened, I watched the vehicle that had struck my truck slide past my driver's side on its side and roll over onto its roof in the center lane and burst into flames ahead of me. I then watched as a white van with a family in it, whom this car had also hit, slid around in front of my truck, hitting the rear of a large tractor-trailer before slamming into the retaining wall of the bridge. The damaged tractor-trailer managed to stop just inches before hitting the overturned car on fire. Luckily two members of the Air Force were driving by in another vehicle and stopped and pulled the occupant from the car before he was seriously burned.

After State Police arrived on scene they tested the driver of the burned vehicle and then arrested him for driving under the influence (we later found out that he also did not have insurance). While no one was seriously injured, at least four families were impacted by the accident, and traffic (you can imagine southbound beach traffic on a Friday night in May) was at a standstill.

To recognize the challenging work of employees in DelDOT's Traffic, Maintenance, Construction, Pavement, Planning and Bridge divisions and DelDOT contractors, the department is hosting a Work Zone Safety Awareness ceremony on April 4. The event is part of National Work Zone Awareness Week, which runs from

April 2-8. DelDOT is reminding travelers to drive with caution within work zones and respect the job and the lives of these men and women. The reason is due to these startling and frightening statistics:

- In Delaware in 2005, three motorists were killed in crashes in or near work zones.
- Nationally, one work zone fatality occurs every seven hours.
- Nationally, one work zone injury occurs every 15 minutes.
- Four out of five work zone fatalities are motorists.

Speaking at the 11 a.m. event will be DelDOT Secretary Carolann Wicks, and DelDOT workers sharing their personal experiences within the work zone.

Secretary Wicks said she hopes that drivers through work zones pay heed to the men and women working there. "We can't stress enough how important it is for drivers to slow down and pay attention," Wicks said. "This is more than about drivers obeying the law and being aware of their surroundings. It's about respecting workers as well as the hazardous situations they are confronted with on a daily basis. At any given time 20 percent of roadways are under construction of some type. The driving public has grown accustomed to back-ups and warning signs, unfortunately complacency can lead to situations we'd all rather avoid."

The unexpected is exactly what happened to George Haldas, Inspector South I Construction in Sussex County. On September 24, 2004, George was project supervisor on the midnight shift doing a pave and rehab contract along SR 1 just north of Frederica. Off in the distance he hears the wailing of police sirens approaching. A high-speed pursuit suddenly came through the work zone with the driver of the vehicle in pursuit losing control and careening off the roadway and into the field where the car stalled. As the police, in close pursuit, approach the vehicle, the driver (a murder suspect from another state) shot and killed himself to avoid arrest and prosecution. George could only imagine what might have transpired had he or any of the work zone people been the first to reach the driver instead of the police.

Kristin Hamilton, Senior Human Resources Representative for Maintenance & Operations of DelDOT's Central District in Kent County, whose duties includes handling all personnel, worker's compensation and FLMA issues knows that when a worker is injured within a work zone the damage often is more than just the physical injury but psychological as well. "When employees are injured on the job, it is impossible not to become personally involved. Although there are policies and procedures to follow, your first instinct is to care for and protect your co-worker," explains Kristin. "The most difficult cases are those when you know the employee's livelihood will be affected. I can handle the paychecks and the bills, but I can't heal someone. These guys do physical labor; a back injury can be career ending. Just having a grown man ask 'what am I supposed to do now?' is a terribly helpless feeling."

The job workers do is difficult enough without having to deal with speeding or inattentive drivers.

While DelDOT requires its employees to get regular work zone safety training, workers want to remind drivers that work zones are designed to warn motorists of upcoming hazards. When traveling through a work zone, please pay careful attention to the traffic control devices present.

- Warning signs will let you know what to expect.
- Drums or cones will delineate your path of travel.
- Flag persons will help direct you along the way. When you see the "orange and black", please be extra cautious.
- Slow down and expect the unexpected.

#####